Chapters 6, 7 UBD and 5, 6 MI

One of the biggest points that all four chapters agreed upon is that students should be able to find meaning in what they are learning as well being able to make connections to real world scenarios. However, all students will come to conclusions at different paces and through different mediums. Lesson planning must be differentiated and flexible so that material can be “translated” from one intelligence to another (known as multimodal teaching), and the chapters provided tools that can aid teachers in achieving this—I will certainly refer to them. The chapters also place emphasis on the idea that understanding often leads to meaning; Tomlinson and McTighe state that “we believe it is through the interplay of drill and practice in combination with authentic tasks (i.e., playing the game) that meaningful learning in achieved.” Along these lines, the UbD chapters often compared students in the classroom to athletes and teachers to coaches, which is a metaphor that is easily relatable for me. UbD chapter 6 discusses the importance of giving all the students the opportunity to “play the game” while also participating in “sideline drills.” This resonated with me because, as an athlete, there are times when I would rather not compete because I am nervous or do not feel that I am ready, but my coach enters me in the race anyway, telling me that it will be a good experience even I don’t hit the time I want. Then, after I finish the race, I feel much more satisfied with myself and I learn something new each time, even if I don’t run a personal best time. If I didn’t have the opportunity to compete, I wouldn’t have the chance to run a fast time let alone learn anything from the experience. Then, after the race, I know exactly what it is that I need to work on or refine for next time, whether it’s going out a little slower, finishing speed, or keeping a consistent pace. In my future classroom, I will always have my students combining “sideline drills” with opportunities to apply their skills. That way, they can learn from their experiences and know what they have mastered and what they need to refine while I can adjust my lesson plans based on how my students are doing, just like my coach refines my training regime after each race.

Chapters 7, 9, 13, 14 MI

I felt that each of the chapters we read discussed ways to bring MI theory to life in the classroom with some methods being more practical than others.  
  
I found the first part of chapter to 7 to be more helpful than the second part because it outlined general aspects of classroom design and how they affect/relate to MIs. I do think that the activity centers are more conducive to and realistic for an elementary school classroom, mainly because teachers at the high school level teach a variety of different grades and classes a day, which means one classroom set up may work for one group of students but not another. Since I will (most likely) be teaching just one subject, it may be plausible for me to set up my classroom in a way that best suits how MIs are used in the English classroom. This might make my set up more universal for all my different grades and classes and still appeal to a variety of intelligences. For example, I might have a quiet reading center with for students to work and read independently (intrapersonal, linguistic), another space across the classroom for students to collaborate (interpersonal), and another space where they move about freely (kinesthetic). I would then incorporate other elements that appeal to the other MIs throughout the classroom, but maybe not in “activity centers.”  
  
I really liked the different ideas for using MI theory in classroom management, but again, I found many of them to be better suited for elementary grades. However, I thought this chapter provided good insight as to how rules and expectations can be conveyed through all the different intelligences, and this is something that I will attempt even in my high school classroom. This chapter made me consider the possibility that the reason some students have behavioral issues could be because the rules are not conveyed in a way that is easily interpreted through their strongest intelligences.  
  
I was glad that chapter 13 provided examples of how technology can be used as a tool for allowing students to work with and explore MIs. Because I’m not great with technology myself, I’m looking for ways to incorporate it into my curriculum that are meaningful and not too complicated and this chapter provided ideas on how to do that while appealing to all MIs.  
  
Lastly, I enjoyed reading about the possible “existential intelligence” because I think it is found in a lot of literature, so I can easily incorporate it into my curriculum!

Chapters 8 UBD and 8, 11, 12 MI

One point that was emphasized at least to some extent in each of the chapters was the importance of focusing on what a given student CAN do versus what he or she cannot do. This applies to special education students in that teachers should use MI theory to help them grow as learners, allowing them to use their stronger intelligences in place of an intelligence that is weaker or less developed. Even though the student may not be taking the same "route" or using the same means as his or her peers, he or she will still reach the desired endpoint one way or another, and maybe even at a different time, and this is okay. By focusing on what special education students CAN do (because in many cases, a student who is deficient on one or more intelligences makes up for it by being extremely strong in another), these students will have better self-esteem and an "increased understanding and appreciation" from their peers (Armstrong, 159). In terms of cognitive skills, a students' memory can be refined by helping them practice it through their strongest intelligences instead of forcing them to memorize content through their weaker intelligences. I really liked the list of ways that memory can be practiced through all the different MIs. It is also important for teachers to use the MIs of their students to help them determine which classroom management strategies will be most effective. If a teacher is trying to manage his/her classroom through strategies that don't appeal to the MIs of his/her students, then the students won't be ask likely to listen and the teacher will get frustrated. This is why the teacher must focus on the strengths of the students. Lastly chapter 8 of UbD discussed the importance of paying attention to the abilities of students when grading them, and also suggested ways to grade most holistically and in ways the support the learning of the student. It is the teacher's job to communicate learning development to the students, focusing just as much on their successes as the things that they need to improve upon. And, just as it is important to differentiate instruction, it also important to differentiate grading strategies to make sure that everything is being accounted for. These are things that I will keep in mind when I have my own students.

Chapters 7, 8, 9, 10 FIAE

Each of these chapters focused on grades and grading policy. While some of the material (especially that found in Chapter 9) seemed like common sense, some of the material struck me as surprising at first, but then made more sense as I continued to read on. For example, I always thought that students should be and are graded on things like participation and effort, but I never considered how such factors could skew a student’s grade in terms of mastery. Because I feel that students deserve to be “rewarded” for their hard work, I thought that it would make sense to include these factors in the grading criteria, but these chapters of the book emphasize that the purpose of grades is to measure mastery and nothing else. This does make sense, however, especially since education has become standards-based. Also, because grades are subjective and oftentimes controversial, it is important for students to understand why they are receiving the grades they get; never let a grade speak for itself. As a teacher, I will make sure to include commentary and rationales along with grades so that students and parents can make sense of them. I also believe in recognizing student effort and participation without including it in the gradebook. Instead, I will use feedback and reinforcement both through formative assessment, and later, in a “separate column on the report card” (112). Like the book states, students are more likely to work harder when they know their effort is appreciated, but they also may need extra feedback and motivation when it comes to putting forth a little more effort. I will never have this extra motivation stem from giving a student a bad grade, however; instead, I will give them feedback before it is time for me to determine their level of mastery. And, if a student is still struggling when the time of assessment comes, I will give them the opportunity to redo the work whenever it is feasible. I found Chapter 10 to have strong insights towards redoing work. For example, I never really considered that allowing students to redo tests whenever they want could result in them becoming “chronic redoers.” This had made me realize that I will need to establish a policy regarding redos before the school year begins so that I can be prepared for all kinds of circumstances.

Chapters 11, 12, 13, 14 FIAE

All four of these chapters provided very useful insight to the grading process and policy that I may not have considered had I not read them. For example, I always thought that a zero was a zero and that it had the same effect in the gradebook as any other failing grade, because an F is an F. Maybe I thought this because I’m simply not a math person and my brain just doesn’t think in terms of averages and numbers and all that, or because I had so many teachers that said an incomplete assignment equaled a zero. I thought that giving a zero for a missing assignment made sense because zero stands for nothing: there was no assignment handed in. BUT, after reading Chapter 11 I can totally see how giving a zero for an incomplete assignment could really mess up a kid’s final grade and skew his level of mastery. In my classroom, I won’t give out zeros for this reason—grades should always indicate mastery, otherwise the evaluation we give our students is inaccurate. I do, however, feel that including comments on report cards is extremely necessary, because it is important to take things like effort, timeliness, and completion rate into consideration. If a student knows that homework isn’t graded in any way shape or form, they are less likely to take it seriously. For this reason, I will include a separate grading criteria beyond mastery when I am assessing my students. I will also try to use a smaller grading scale whenever possible, as suggested in Chapter 12, because it is more useful and can provide better feedback. In terms of the different types of gradebook formats presented in Chapter 13, I personally liked the format that grades according to standards. Not only are standards becoming more prominent in schools, I think that this format allows more specificity to student mastery and are therefore more useful, insightful, and less subjective than categorizing mastery based on assessment type. Of course, I understand that this format will not work all the time, and it is important to be flexible and tailor gradebook formats to student needs and course objectives. (I also really liked the topics-based gradebook approach because it connects topic to assignments and is quite specific.) In terms of report card formats, I simply couldn’t decide which I liked best; I think it will depend on my students and the school I am teaching in.